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Oregon Daily Emerald GAME DAY

Best Bet
UCLA at Stanford,
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Linebackers proving to be pure mayhem

■ Oregon's three Ms — Mallard, Moretti and Mitchell, all new starters this season — are gelling well in the core of defense

By Chris Cabot
Oregon Daily Emerald

Much of the notoriety and praise has gone to Joey Harrington and the offense in Oregon's 6-1 start this season.

But on the other side of the ball, three of the Ducks' key players are trying to prove that defense wins championships.

Despite their relative inexperience in starting roles at the collegiate level before this season, the linebacker trio of Wesly Mallard, Kevin Mitchell and David Moretti features three of the top four leading tacklers for Oregon this season.

"We are young, but I don't think that has shown as much as people thought it was going to," Moretti said. "We have a very good grasp of the defense and work well together."

After last Saturday's loss to Stanford, a game in which the Ducks gave up 49 points compared to just seven against California, the defense knows it needs to get back on track.

"We've got a lot of good teams coming up, so it's time for us to step up and play better football," Mitchell said.

Mallard, Mitchell and Moretti came to Oregon following different paths, but have now "gelled well as a group," Moretti said.

Mallard, a senior in his fourth year playing for the team, made a name for himself on the squad as a standout on special teams play. He also ran for the track team, taking advantage of his 4.34-second 40-meter time, which is the fastest 40 time by anyone ever to play linebacker for the Ducks.

Mitchell and Moretti, who both graduated high school in 1999, were standouts. Mitchell attended Mater Dei High in Orange, Calif., which was ranked No. 2 in the country his senior year, and was considered one of the best players in the school's history. Moretti later tallied six sacks at Chabot Junior College, where he played for his first year of eligibility.

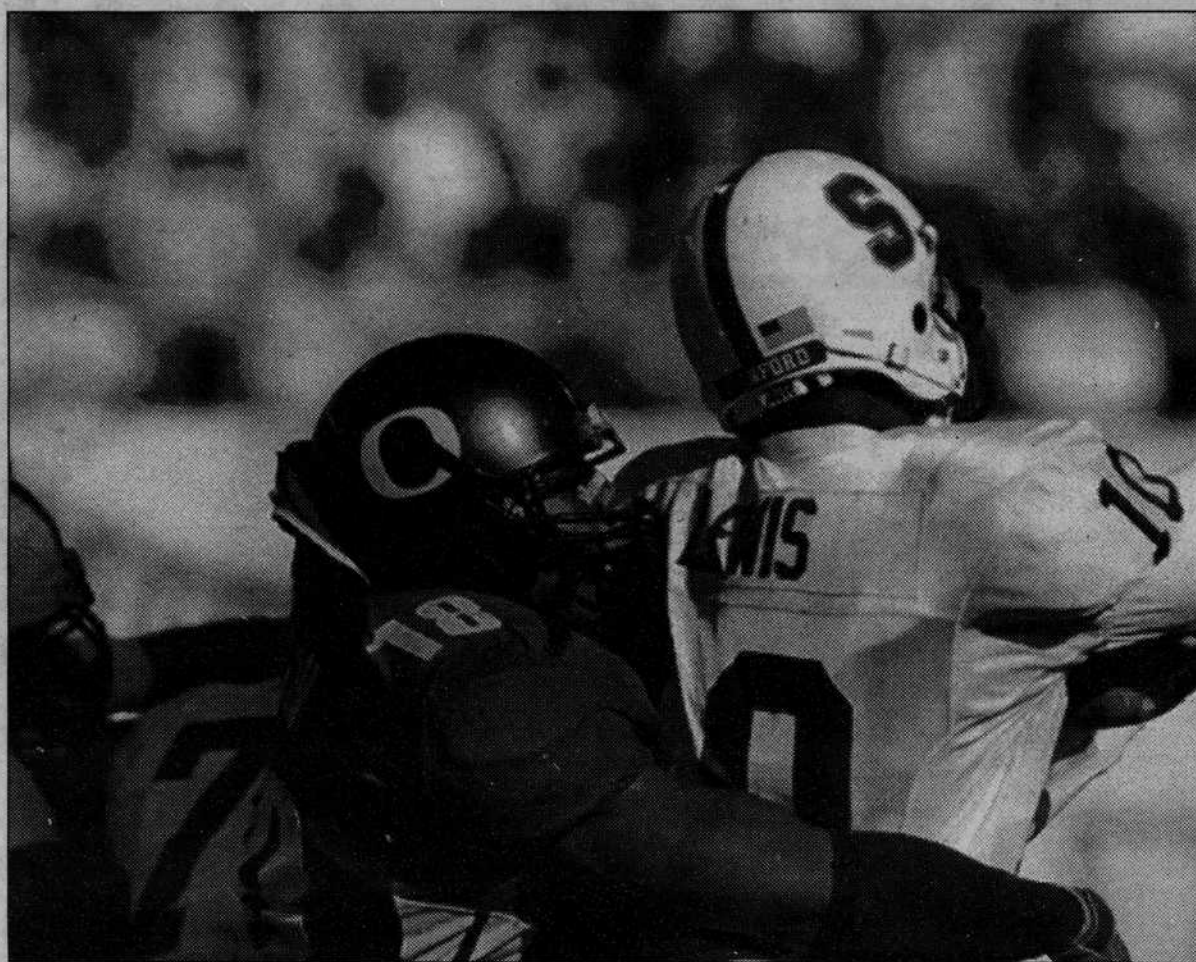
The three are featured together as part of the billboard promotion the football team has plastered around Eugene. Along with pictures of the three is the word "mayhem," following the "M" theme.

Senior tackle Chris Tetterton is aware of the impact the three have on the field, and said that their inexperience has not shown.

"They are like three old veterans," Tetterton said. "I trust them the whole time we're out there."

The three linebackers are in the top 10 in the Pacific-10 Conference in tackles; Mitchell leads the team in sacks with three and Mallard has forced two fumbles, which has him tied for second in the conference. The statistics, the publicity and their leadership roles on the team put added pressure on the players, but they say they've handled it well.

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Adam Amato Emerald

Oregon linebacker Wesly Mallard and the Ducks had a tough time containing Stanford and its back-up quarterback Chris Lewis on Oct. 20.

Top offenses to collide in cold

■ With an edge statistically, No. 14 Washington State hosts No. 11 Oregon in what could be freezing conditions

By Adam Jude
Oregon Daily Emerald

Glance over to the right about six inches. Now slowly move your eyes up about three more inches. See that gray box, called "The Box"? Check out that first Pacific-10 Conference ranking stat, called "Total Offense." Washington State, as noted, is No. 1; Oregon is No. 4.

These rankings help show how each team compares in different categories, but because of space limitations, explanatory numbers are not included.

Thus, the remaining 14 inches of this story will try to explain the meaning of the box in order to better

preview how the Oregon-Washington State contest will turn out.

First, it should be noted that the guys in Las Vegas are calling it a three-point game in the Cougars' favor. The numbers, or "The Box," say Washington State is the top-scoring team in the conference, averaging 44 points per game. The Ducks are fourth at nearly 39 points.

Passing offense? Yep, the Cougs, led by quarterback Jason Gesser, are the best in the Pac-10 with 327 yards per game. Joey Harrington's Ducks are, again, fourth at 261.9.

In all, the Cougars appear to have the edge — everywhere.

Numbers and predictions aside, though, the Ducks and Cougars still have to hit the field Saturday at 4 p.m. for a regionally televised game on ABC that will no doubt have a major impact on the Pac-10 championship.

As noted, the two quarterbacks that will take the field at Martin Stadium in Pullman, Wash., are among the best in the nation. Harrington's Heisman campaign, while dwindling, is still active.

If anyone, Gesser, a junior, would be the next Pac-10 signal caller to have a 100-foot billboard in New York.

"He's a good scrambler," Oregon defensive tackle Chris Tetterton said. "He's a little quarterback, something we haven't seen this year. We're just going to have to take it and stick to our guns like we have all season. Just gotta bring it to 'em."

While the respective offenses will be bringin' it Saturday, the game will most likely be decided on the defensive side of the ball.

Again, Washington State stands out statistically with the best rush defense

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Surprising WSU aims to stay undefeated

■ A mobile Jason Gesser has led the Cougars to a 7-0 record, the team's best since its 1998 Rose Bowl season

By Hank Hager
Oregon Daily Emerald

Idaho, Boise State, California, Arizona, Oregon State, Stanford and, most recently, Montana State, have all fallen victim to Washington State this season en route to the Cougars' 7-0 start.

Seven and 0?

For all you Duck fans out there, that is not a typo. Indeed, the Cougs are 7-0, and ranked 14th in the nation. Meanwhile, the Ducks are 6-1, and barely ranked higher than Wazzu at No. 11. At No. 10 in the BCS, the Cougars are ranked higher than

the No. 13 Ducks.

Could anyone have believed this when the Pacific-10 Conference media chose Washington State to finish last in the conference at the start of the season? They were chosen farther down than California, which has yet to win a game.

Quarterback Jason Gesser and Washington State head coach Mike Price, that's who. Even Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti has become a believer.

When asked to discuss Washington State's offense earlier this week, Bellotti replied: "Do I have to?"

"Gesser, and those receivers, and their running backs and the offensive line ... they spread you out," he said. "Gesser is extremely mobile — he's got great touch on the long ball. They're a great football

team that is statistically by far the best team in this conference."

That's right, Gesser — the same player who saw his season end last year when the Ducks unceremoniously broke his left leg. But he has come back with a vengeance this season, averaging 265.4 yards per game in the air, the best in the Pac-10.

"(Gesser) can improvise and do things on his own," Price told the Daily Evergreen about the redshirt junior. "He can make something out of nothing."

Which is exactly what he has done. Wazzu has a chance to go 8-0 with a win over Oregon, which hasn't happened since the 1930 squad went 9-0. That team lost to Alabama

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THE BOX

Key Number:
327.4

Average yards per game in the air for the Washington State offense, good for sixth in the nation and first in the Pac-10. The Ducks' pass defense allows 295.5 yards per game, ninth in the Pac-10.

**Pac-10
Rankings:**

Total Offense

Washington State.....1
Oregon.....4

Scoring Offense

Washington State.....1
Oregon.....4

Passing Offense

Washington State.....1
Oregon.....4

Rushing Offense

Oregon.....4
Washington State.....5

Total Defense

Washington State.....2
Oregon.....9

Scoring Defense

Washington State.....4
Oregon.....5

Passing Defense

Washington State.....5
Oregon.....9

Rushing Defense

Washington State.....1
Oregon.....5

Quotable

*"Do I have to?
They're too
good."*

Mike Bellotti

Oregon head coach, when asked to describe Washington State's potent offense. The Cougars rank third in the nation in total offense, and quarterback Jason Gesser is first in the Pac-10 in passing yards per game and total offense.

Key Player:
Jason Gesser,
Washington
State
quarterback

Gesser saw his season end last year when a hit by the Oregon defense broke his left fibula in a 27-24 Ducks' win. He looks to lead the Cougars past Oregon for the first time since 1997, and for what would be their first win at Martin Stadium against the Ducks since 1996.